

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as set out in the following listing of claims. This claim listing replaces and supersedes all prior listings of the claims.

1. (Currently Amended) A signal processing method in which an input signal is quantized to provide a sequence and the sequence is converted to a code word string by variable-length coding of the sequence, comprising:

a step of replacing one code word of the code word string with some other code word shorter than the one code word and ~~having a value approximate to that of the~~ representing a part of said sequence having a smaller amplitude than the amplitude of the sequence of said one code word.

2. (Original) The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the other code word is a one equal to a code word provided by quantization of the one code word.

3. (Original) The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the variable-length coding is an entropy coding by which a shorter code is allocated to a sequence whose probability of occurrence is higher.

4. (Original) The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the sequence is represented by a pair of a run length (run) being a number of consecutive zeroes included before a non-zero numeral and an amplitude (amp) being the non-zero numeral and the one code word is replaced

with some other code word corresponding to a pair in which "amp" is approximate to that in the initial pair.

5. (Original) The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein for pixels of a video signal, forming each input frame, the frame is divided into a plurality of blocks, the block is subjected to discrete cosine transform (DCT), a DCT coefficient of the DCT-transformed block is quantized based on quantization information, the DCT coefficient having been subjected to the quantization is arranged in a one-dimensional sequence, and then subjected to the variable-length coding.

6. (Currently Amended) The method as set forth in Claim 6, 5, wherein the code word replacement is effected in the order from the higher-order DCT coefficient to lower-order one in the sequence, and ended when a bit amount provided by the variable-length coding of the sequence is reached.

7. (Currently Amended) A signal processor in which an input signal is quantized to provide a sequence and the sequence is converted to a code word string by variable-length coding of the sequence, comprising:

means for replacing one code word of the code word string with some other code word shorter than the one code word and ~~having a value approximate to that of the~~ representing a part of said sequence having a smaller amplitude than the amplitude of the sequence of said one code word.

8. (Previously Presented) The signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the other code word is a one equal to a code word provided by quantization of the one code word.

9. (Previously Presented) The signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the variable-length coding is an entropy coding by which a shorter code is allocated to a sequence whose probability of occurrence is higher.

10. (Previously Presented) The signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the sequence is represented by a pair of a run length (run) being a number of consecutive zeroes included before a non-zero numeral and an amplitude (amp) being the non-zero numeral and the one code word is replaced with some other code word corresponding to a pair in which "amp" is approximate to that in the initial pair.

11. (Previously Presented) The signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein for pixels of a video signal, forming each input frame, the frame is divided into a plurality of blocks, the block is subjected to discrete cosine transform (DCT), a DCT coefficient of the DCT-transformed block is quantized based on quantization information, the DCT coefficient having been subjected to the quantization is arranged in a one-dimensional sequence, and then subjected to the variable-length coding.

12. (Previously Presented) The signal processor as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the code word replacement is effected in the order from the higher-order DCT coefficient to lower-

order one in the sequence, and ended when a bit amount provided by the variable-length coding of the sequence is reached.